

Testimony of Chief Victor Rodriguez
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before the
House Committee on Homeland Security
Subcommittee on Oversight Investigations and Management
“On the Border and in the Line of Fire: U.S. Law Enforcement, Homeland
Security and Drug Cartel Violence”
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Mr. Chairman, Honorable Members of the Committee, it is an honor to be before you today.

On behalf of the City of McAllen and the McAllen Police Department, I extend our thanks for the opportunity to provide this testimony.

The subject of the violence in Mexico bring us together today.

There is some, maybe a great degree, of impression that the violence in Mexico is limited to the US/Mexico border and that US cities in that border area are experiencing the same lawlessness.

It is true, violence in Mexico continues unabated.

Horrific acts of violence, gruesome killings, mass murder and countless atrocities typify the violence in Mexico today.

Whereas we tend to believe that this lawlessness occurs only in the border region of Mexico, there appears to be no part of Mexico that has been spared by such violence.

And,

Whereas we tend to believe that the reach of the drug trafficking cartel's activities, whether such be drug trafficking or drug related violence, is limited to our border communities, there is no corner of our country that has been immune from the effects of that reach.

We know that people in Mexico live in constant fear, not just for their safety, but for their lives, the lives of their children and for their personal property.

Their stories are pure HORROR.

We often listen to them. We listen to them, because they escape to the United States and to our communities. They come to our communities because they feel safe here. All of them get here as fast they can.

They envy our ability to simply call 9-1-1, get a police response and TRUST the system. Citizens in Mexico, do not have a 9-1-1 system that they trust.

Their safety and often their lives are at the MERCY of what they encounter on any given day.

ALL of this however IS Mexico.

My city is a border city. It is as any other U.S. City and in many cases, a better, safer and less crime ridden city. I would say that such is the case for all of Texas' border cities.

We are thriving communities. We are growing communities. All of our border cities are part of the economic engine of Texas.

We get up everyday.

We send our kids to school and we go to work everyday just like other Americans throughout our country.

Nonetheless, there are important questions to explore. It is important to see clearly through the FOG of all of this.

There is no question that drug trafficking at the hands of Mexican Drug Trafficking Organizations poses a concern for all of us in the United States.

There is no question that the violence in Mexico at the hands of Mexican Drug Trafficking Organizations poses a concern for all of us in the United States; and

There is no question that the apparent unreliability of the criminal justice system in Mexico poses a concern to all of us as well.

So the questions are:

Is the violence in Mexico unprecedented?

Does the violence in Mexico threaten the American criminal justice system?

Does the violence in Mexico represent a public safety concern to us?

I respectfully suggest that the answers are YES, NO, and YES.

Violence In Mexico Is Unprecedented.

For some time now, Mexico has suffered from an image that portrays corruption, drug trafficking and drug related crime and violence.

The violence in Mexico today, however, is unprecedented. It is a war between drug trafficking organizations. It has taken the form of direct challenges and firefights with authorities in Mexico.

If they, the drug trafficking organizations, were forces from another country, Mexico could be seen as being at war and NOT winning.

The Violence In Mexico Does Not Threaten The American Criminal Justice System.

Whereas these drug trafficking organizations exercise their will in Mexico, they cannot threaten our communities, our criminal justice system, and our form of government in the same manner.

This is because we have local, state and federal police officers that rise to the challenge every day. They are in the hunt everyday. They identify, arrest and prosecute bad guys everyday. They seize contraband every day.

Most importantly, we have a criminal justice system behind these officers, that is reliable, trustworthy and it is not subject to be trampled on, ignored or made irrelevant.

These officers and this system are untiring. They never rest.

I recognize that we have victims of crime every day. However the system they entrust for help, is not threatened by criminals.

The Violence In Mexico Is A Public Safety Concern To Us.

Should we simply disregard all this as something not occurring in our country?

No.

We seize thousands and thousands of tons of drugs that we know were trafficked by these Drug Trafficking Organizations. Drug trafficking through Mexico spans decades. Every ounce of those drugs was unlawfully introduced into our country. In every case, Drug Trafficking Organizations trampled on our borders.

Today, multi-ton seizures are not uncommon.

There are landowners today that fear working their lands because of these constant incursions.

To this end, we have built walls, virtual fences and added thousands of boots on the ground. It is obvious that doing less on this front is not acceptable.

The violence in Mexico does affect us. There are acts of crime that reach beyond Mexico.

Although we do not fear this violence as if it were an INVADING FORCE at our doorstep, our watch is constant and our concern ever present.

The threat is not a visible army of criminals, the threat is invisible.

The threat is drug trafficking money that creeps, infiltrates and corrupts our communities. The threat is the crime that drug trafficking money causes. The threat is the criminals that drug trafficking money buys.

I would submit that it is prudent to be cognizant of the instabilities in our southern neighbor, it is prudent to contemplate worst case scenarios, it is prudent to plan contingencies, and it is prudent to take measured steps.

As we approach those steps, it is also prudent to consider that we are not a lawless frontier and spillover does not mean an invasion.

Weapons and Ammunition.

The violence in Mexico is the concern that has brought us together today. That very violence, the violence we decry today occurs at the hands of U.S. weapons and ammunition unlawfully sold and exported to Mexico.

Sadly, today we believe that we may have lost one of our very own ICE agents to U.S. weapons and ammunition.

I respectfully suggest that we study, propose and pass legislation that more tightly controls the sale, resale, purchase, multiple purchases, possession and transportation of weapons and ammunitions.

I respectfully suggest that we study, propose and pass legislation that more tightly controls and more severely criminalizes the unlawful sale, resale, purchase, multiple purchases, possession, transportation and exportation of weapons and ammunition.

I realize that these suggestions place our right to bear arms front and center. I do not wish to trample on that. However, I believe that our right to bear arms is not a right to arm a WAR in a foreign country.

Approximately 70% of Murders in Texas are committed by firearms. Few contest that over 90% of the weapons and ammunition in Mexico are U.S. made.

I believe that in addressing weapons and ammunition in this manner, we will make our communities safer.

Southbound Steady-State Inspections.

I respectfully suggest that we control our borders OUTBOUND through steady-state port of exit inspections, similar to port of entry inspections.

Please study, propose and pass legislation that creates a steady-state law enforcement presence at our ports of exit.

We need effective and efficient southbound inspections designed to encourage compliance with U.S. laws and to deter exportation of guns and ammunition, stolen property and fugitives.

We have built human fences, real fences and we have built virtual fences. Those fences have great big holes in them: The ports of exit. They serve as express lanes to Mexico.

Those ports of exit are our last line of defense. Whereas criminal activity in Mexico sometimes extends beyond Mexico and into our streets, it does so because they can simply escape to their safe havens in Mexico.

We must deter that mentality. If we don't, and escape to Mexico is merely an exercise, then the violence in Mexico will be ours to confront.

Lets deter and stop the unlawful exportation of guns and ammunition.

Lets stop the daily southbound unimpeded flow of OUR citizen's stolen vehicles and stolen property.

Lets stop the daily southbound unimpeded flow of murderers, rapists, sex offenders and violent offenders.

Steady-state south bound inspections will do that.

Border Financial Crimes Task Force.

Finally, I suggest that the underlying basis for of these threats is illicit money. Money corrupts people and systems.

Illicit money is the real threat. It is that invisible threat.

Immediately following the attacks on us on September 11th, we moved to identify and freeze financial assets. We moved in the direction of human intelligence and investigations.

I suggest that the violence in Mexico and the threat it poses to Mexico and to our communities, requires a September 11th type of response from our country.

Please study, propose and pass legislation that creates a BORDER FINANCIAL CRIMES TASK FORCE.

Not only is this proposition an effective tool, it will serve as a direct counter to the problem. It will serve as that "line in the sand". We must ANSWER the concern.

We need coordinated, regionalized investigative law enforcement to help identify and to act against violent offenders and criminal organizations.

In this context, if you gave me a choice between 500 boots on the ground or 25 investigators, I would say 25 investigators. Let's investigate the MONEY.

We should move against illicit funds and assets associated with criminal organizations.

We owe our communities comprehensive and responsible action.

I respectfully thank you for this opportunity and hope that we have contributed to a better America.

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